

Laudato Si', Communication Ethics, and the Common Good: Toward a Dialogic Meeting amid Environmental Crisis

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POPE FRANCIS'S SECOND ENCYCLICAL, *Laudato Si'*, directly addresses the responsibility all persons share for the care of our common home, the earth. This essay investigates Pope Francis's conception of integral ecology as a communication ethic that calls humans to being in communion with God and all of God's creation. *Laudato Si'*, therefore, reveals integral ecology as a constructive means to embrace a pastoral and existential call to care for our common good and our common home.

COMMUNICATION ETHICS AND THEOLOGY

As ethics implies philosophical investigation and analysis, philosophy of communication and communication ethics share a symbiotic relationship that characterizes each as forms of alterity or as "two gatherings of radical difference that demand our understanding and learning."¹ Such radical alterity emerges through communication and analysis of competing perspectives of value and meaning. As globalization continues to reinforce, we "dwell within otherness, a diversity of positions that we bring to the Other."²

Situating communication ethics then within the contesting narratives of social reality whether of political orientation or faith tradition, Arnett defines communication ethics as "a multiplicity of communication ethic positions, each of which recognizes a bias or ground that

¹ Ronald C. Arnett, "Introduction," in *Philosophy of Communication Ethics: Alterity and the Other*, eds. Ronald C. Arnett and Pat Arneson (New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2014), xi.

² Arnett, "Introduction," xi. The Other characterizes all subjects that are distinct from oneself as well as one's relation to meaning as brought forth into being through one's encounter with and response to the call of the Other. The self is always situated within a community of alterity in terms of persons, times, locations, narratives, and meanings. The idea of Other employed within this essay can refer to other human persons, ideas and ideologies, religious perspectives, as well as one's relationship to the Trinitarian God as radical Other in relation to and distinct from one's temporal human self.

promotes a given sense of the 'good.'"³ Such a position assumes the centrality of meeting difference and alterity situated within interpersonal, cultural, historical, and existential contexts. Situating meeting thus limits and clarifies that a "glimpse, not a grasp, guides communication ethics that protects the ground of another."⁴ Communication ethics inquiry allows for discovery of how orientation to the Other communicates and reveals ethical conceptions of identity, agency, and orders of values that allow one to discern good and evil amid the choices demanded within everyday life.

The development of dialogue as a philosophical orientation to communication ethics draws heavily from the scholarship on narrative, featuring the works of Alasdair MacIntyre and Walter Fisher as synthesized by Arnett. "Dialogic ethics begins in narrative bias that situates an ethic. The dialogic turn takes us to the Otherness of temporality and conviction walking side-by-side with doubt, vulnerability, and a willingness to learn."⁵ Narratives then may be viewed to function as continuing dialogues that bring tradition forward into communication within evolving existential reality and may therefore be dialogic in terms of their ethicality as providing orders of values and ways of living. Consequently, within the developing conceptual framework of Mikhail Bakhtin, "Life by its very nature is dialogic."⁶ Engaging other consciousnesses in open dialogue allows a person to participate with the entirety of his being throughout his "whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium."⁷ The embodied being of a human person can then be perceived through the lens of dialogic communicative activity.

However, Michael Holquist states that this is not to mean that the dialogue is a dyadic structure, rather it is triadic, and perhaps even Trinitarian. Bakhtin's conception of dialogue is composed of an utterance, a reply, and a relation between the two. It is the relation that is the most important of the three. This relation which Bakhtin designates as the superaddressee characterizes a third presence to dialogue

³ Ronald C. Arnett and Pat Arneson, "A Conversation about Communication Ethics with Ronald C. Arnett," in *Exploring Communication Ethics: Interviews with Influential Scholars in the Field*, ed. Pat Arneson (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 57.

⁴ Arnett and Arneson, "A Conversation about Communication Ethics," 60.

⁵ Ronald C. Arnett, Pat Arneson, and LeeAnne M. Bell, "Communication Ethics: The Dialogic Turn," in *Exploring Communication Ethics: Interviews with Influential Scholars in the Field*, ed. Pat Arneson (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 169.

⁶ Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans., Caryl Emerson (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 293.

⁷ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 293.

situated outside the present context that completes the dialogic nature of the word through its responsive understanding of the subject's utterance. The irony is that it is through this outsideness that understanding develops. For Bakhtin, it is in this idea of the third party to the dialogue that the author "presupposes a higher superaddressee, whose absolutely just responsive understanding is presumed, either in some metaphysical distance or in distant historical time (the loophole addressee)."⁸ Each dialogue always takes place before this assumed responsive understanding.

Ruth Coates, an early interpreter of the theological elements of Bakhtin's thought, offers two reasons why one may rightly ascribe the role of the supradressee to God in the work of Bakhtin. First, the terminology Bakhtin uses places it in a theological context. Second, Coates argues, that Bakhtin's conception of dialogue requires that "undoubted personalism because being less than personal must be considered unworthy and incapable of the ultimate understanding of the superaddressee."⁹ For inherent in Bakhtin's thought is the necessity of embodied speaking. Dialogue requires the voices of at least two figures engaged. The role of the superaddressee, a personage able to give understanding, is therefore also required to be embodied. For only God can be simultaneously within human relations and without so as to provide the necessary distance to make each utterance understandable. For as noted previously, personality (being) is born in relation and "understanding is its highest goal."¹⁰ Therefore, if to exist is to communicate and communication is then viewed from the perspective of Bakhtin's conception of dialogue, God serves as superaddressee, an eternal author of meaning that calls one to communion, to our common home. Working from Bakhtin's conception of dialogue as implicating a speaker, addressee, and superaddressee, we perceive within this Trinitarian nature Being intertwined with communication, as God, the *Logos*, spoke the world into existence. Hence, from a human perspective, communication and the ability to communicate equate to being, social presence, and identity. Without the ability to voice one's heart and mind, one essentially ceases to exist.

The contexts of dialogue extend into the deepest past and the most distant future. Even meanings born in dialogues of the remotest past will never be finally grasped once and for all, for they will always be renewed in later dialogue. At any present moment of the dialogue, there are great masses of forgotten meanings, but these will be recalled

⁸ Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. trans. Vern W. McGee, eds. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1986), 126.

⁹ Ruth Coates, *Christianity in Bakhtin: God and the Exiled Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 160.

¹⁰ Coates, *Christianity in Bakhtin*, 160.

again and given new life. "For nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will someday have its homecoming festival."¹¹ Meaning, then, emerges through encountering the Other in dialogue. Through acknowledgement of one's situatedness within alterity and subsequent response to the eternally recurring call of the Other to dialogue, one communicates the meaning of one's existence as being in relation.

The theological implications of Bakhtin's conception of human existence and communication as a dialogue engendered between a speaker, addressee, and superaddressee can be further realized through encountering John Zizioulas' theological anthropology. Zizioulas conceives of the person as relational in nature. As with Bakhtin's claim that "nothing is absolutely dead" and that being is viewed as akin to communication, Zizioulas asserts that:

Human personhood implies the 'openness of being', and even more than that, the *ek-stasis* of being, i.e., a movement towards communion which leads to a transcendence of the boundaries of the 'self' and thus to *freedom*.... [T]he person in its ekstastic character reveals its being in a *catholic*, i.e., integral and undivided, way, and thus in its being ekstastic it becomes *hypostatic*, i.e., the bearer of its nature in its totality.¹²

Zizioulas then clarifies and expands upon his idea of human personhood as he states that *stasis* or being "is realized in human personhood as *ek-stasis* (communion, relatedness) and as *hypo-stasis* (particularity, uniqueness)."¹³ The human person is called to be in relation, in dialogue with the Other in the human faces we meet in temporality as well as in the eternal radical Otherness of the Trinitarian personhood of God. Then as Bakhtin conceives of meaning as emergent through embodied speaking as the person meets the Other in the relation of dialogue, Zizioulas states that "*To be* and *to be in relation* becomes identical."¹⁴ The relation allows meaning to emerge and connects the activity of communication as embodiment of human being.

Zizioulas also reconciles the union of one and many within the Trinitarian personhood of God as he states that the "substance of God, 'God', has no ontological content, no true being, apart from communion."¹⁵ Traces of this sense of the Personhood of God realized in the

¹¹ Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*, 170.

¹² John D. Zizioulas, "Human Capacity and Human Incapacity: A Theological Exploration of Personhood," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 28 (1975): 401-447, at 407-08.

¹³ Zizioulas, "Human Capacity," 425, n 1.

¹⁴ John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 89 (emphasis original).

¹⁵ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 17.

relations of the divine mystery of the Trinity are also present within *Laudato Si'*. While each person, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, performed related yet distinctive work in authoring creation, creation resounds with the beauty of the mystery of "one God who is Trinitarian communion" (*Laudato Si'*, no. 239). Pope Francis connects the nature of creation to the nature of God. He continues:

The Franciscan saint [Bonaventure] teaches us that *each creature bears in itself a specifically Trinitarian structure*, so real that it could be readily contemplated if only the human gaze were not so partial, dark and fragile. In this way, he points out to us the challenge of trying to read reality in a Trinitarian key. (*Laudato Si'*, no. 239)

Following the little poor man of Assisi, Pope Francis relates that "Everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of Trinity" (*Laudato Si'*, no. 240). Relationship unites three within one God and unites all creatures on earth toward God, all integral within the ecology of the relationships that form the Trinity and all life.

In this way, communion through ecological instruction situated within Church teaching on the mystery of the Trinity reveals "why the Church set before the world the ideal of a 'civilization of love.' Social love is the key to authentic development" (*Laudato Si'*, no. 231). Authentic development moves us toward openness to love of the Other and allows one to encounter God in creatures and creation as revealed through the gift of the Eucharist.

The Eucharist joins heaven and earth; it embraces and penetrates all creation. The world which came forth from God's hands returns to him in blessed and undivided adoration: in the bread of the Eucharist, "creation is projected towards divinization, towards the wedding feast, towards unification with the Creator himself." Thus, the Eucharist is also a source of light and motivation for our concerns for the environment, directing us to be stewards of all creation. (*Laudato Si'*, no. 236, quoting Pope Benedict XVI)

Therefore, creation prompts an openness to revelation as a form of instruction in the mysteries of God's own life. The teachings of the Church Fathers guide us to a dialogic orientation to revelation. Through the interplay and interpenetration of meanings among *theologia* (theology) and *oikonomia* (economy), we come to the "mystery of God's inmost life within the Blessed Trinity" (theology) with and through "all the works by which God reveals himself and communicates his life" (economy).¹⁶ Through these interpenetrating communi-

¹⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 236.

cative encounters, we come to learn of how God manifests God's being within the created world. As Pope Francis states, "Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise" (*Laudato Si'*, no. 12). Such a mystery invites one to contemplate the ways in which God communicates throughout the myriad forms of creation.

Revelation derives from the Greek *apokalypsis* and Latin *revelatio*, translating the Hebrew *glh*, which designates an "unveiling" or "disclosure" of something hidden. As previously noted, engaging revelation as a dialogic orientation to instruction on the mysteries of God through encounters with God's works, we can come to encounter God through openness and attentive listening with our hearts to the Word of God: "The most intimate truth thus revealed about God and human salvation shines forth for us in Christ" (*Dei Verbum*, no. 2). Such encounters with the creative and communicative activity of God through meeting his Word in dialogue provide "constant evidence of himself in created realities" (*Dei Verbum*, no. 3). Acknowledgement of God's presence in creation communicates an openness and assent to God's revelation, and helps to form the narrative of faith, "Tradition and scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the word of God, which is entrusted to the church" (*Dei Verbum*, no. 10). The narrative accumulation of such teachings and recordings of theology and economy show how the Church's continuing interpretation and communication of God's revelation of the Word in Christ may transform the context and being of a person's life in coming "to know the ineffable loving-kindness of God and see the thought and care he has given to accommodating his language to our nature" (*Dei Verbum*, no. 12). As the Second Vatican Council affirms: "Indeed the words of God, expressed in human language, are in every way like human speech, just as the Word of the eternal Father, when he took on himself the weak flesh of human beings, became like them" (*Dei Verbum*, no. 13). Hence, as we gain wisdom from the revelation of narrative history of sacred Scripture and the Magisterium, from the writings of saints' lives and miracles, and from the living narrative tradition of Catholic Social Teaching, we understand how to situate human activity within and for the love of God and God's creation.

The virtue of *caritas*, love of God, along with the virtues of faith and hope, embedded within this developing dialogue as communicative activity that encounters the Other based upon an ethics or set of ethical commitments oriented toward relationship with the Other—how does this lead us toward an integral ecology that communicates love for all creatures as emanating from God and within God? How does this dialogic standpoint/perspective open us to revelations that

can enrich our living in communion? To be means to communicate, one's existence tells the story of one's values, commitments, choices, consequences; yet how can this be realized in relation? Authoring a constructive ethical response requires acknowledgement of the importance of embodied listening, listening situated within temporality that enriches our ability to hear the Word of God in revelation, as well as the call of the Other to being in communion.

An important component of this call to being in dialogue is that such dialogic encounters occur at the nexus of time and space, interpenetrating human identity, as Lisbeth Lipari suggests when she argues that we address time as "the very relationship of the subject with the other."¹⁷ This insight also affirms Pope Francis's conception of time and space as interdependent, as noted above. "Two concepts from the ancient Greek language give us insight into the relation of ethics and temporality: the words *kairos*—right timing or the opportune moment—and *akroasis*—listening and invoking the idea of secret, esoteric teachings."¹⁸

Lipari connects both concepts to ideas of harmony and balance. This positions *kairos* as an ethical response that arises from *akroasis*—from "a listening attunement that transcends binary oppositions and the presumed spatial linear progressions of past, present, and future."¹⁹ From this perspective, Lipari characterizes *kairos* as a "nonlinear way of synchronous listening and speaking, a dialogic midwifery that, as an ethics, can give birth to speech."²⁰ Thus, in dialogic meeting, listening bears speech. "The ethical relation is thus a temporal, embodied, and intersubjective process, an achievement accomplished by weaving the web of *kairos* into the warp of *akroasis*."²¹ The dialogue of eternal and temporal is likewise made present through Trinitarian communion and the mystery of the Incarnation of the eternal Word, spoken in and eternally speaking throughout history.

However, one must prepare oneself to hear with one's inner ear and soul the call to a universal communion. This relates to Nelle Morton's insights and Lipari's description of "how listening others to speech is itself an ethics" as "we empower one another by hearing the other to speech. We empower the disinherited, the outsider."²² This leads Lipari to conclude:

¹⁷ Lisbeth Lipari, "Ethics, Kairos, Akroasis: An Essay on Time and Relation," in *Philosophy of Communication Ethics: Alterity and the Other*, eds. Ronald C. Arnett and Pat Arneson (New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2014), 76.

¹⁸ Lipari, "Ethics," 76.

¹⁹ Lipari, "Ethics," 77.

²⁰ Lipari, "Ethics," 77.

²¹ Lipari, "Ethics," 79.

²² Lipari, "Ethics," 84.

Listening is the source of the ethical relation with alterity: Listening is a form of co-constitutive communicative action fundamental to dialogic ethics. That is, listening is neither a secondary subordinate process that follows and flows from speech, nor is it a futile gesture. Rather, listening is the invisible and inaudible enactment of the ethical relation itself; upon it, everything depends.²³

Pope Francis can therefore be shown through his invitational dialogic appeal to live within an ecology open to embrace the Other in gratitude, humility, respect, and love. Pope Francis calls this dialogic relationship between thou and Thou a “universal communion” and also uses the terms “sublime communion” as well as “deep communion” to announce the value and ethical import of this orientation to being within Being (*Laudato Si'*, no. 89-92).

LAUDATO SI', COMMUNICATION ETHICS, AND COMMUNION

Pope Francis's conception of being in relation as dialogue therefore enacts embodied speaking, bringing forth one's being as open to a “universal communion” with the myriad forms of difference one encounters in the temporal existential moment. Therefore, communion may come forth within creation through understanding the dialogic nature of human being as in relation with and open to dialogue with the Word. The various adjectives of communion Francis employs in *Laudato Si'* help to uncover layers of meaning relevant for how his encyclical unfolds Catholic social teaching beyond the regular audience of the Catholic hierarchy to “a conversion which includes everyone” (*Laudato Si'*, no. 14). Therefore, it is important to explore the related meaning each conception adds to our understanding of Pope Francis's idea of a “universal communion.”

Pope Francis describes a “sublime communion” as originating from our realization that “as part of the universe, called into being by one Father, all of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family” (*Laudato Si'*, no. 89). Our recognition of our belonging to this universal family “fills us with a sacred and humble respect” (*Laudato Si'*, no. 89). Our sense of belonging to one family unites our destiny with that of all who share our familial bonds, all of God's creation.

This recognition confronts and challenges the rampant greed and narcissism present in our created culture of death crippled by human trafficking, exploitation, and pollution of natural resources for profit of the privileged few. A recognition of our familial bond granted by God requires that we resist efforts to normalize inequality, poverty,

²³ Lispari, “Ethics,” 85.

economic exploitation for the profits and pampering of a wealthy minority caste as of more worth than the remaining members of our human family (*Laudato Si'*, no. 90). This should not be used to devalue conceptions of the human person as made in the image of God or cause cynicism that prompts notions that the human person should not be valued and viewed as less worthy of respect and protection than other forms of life or the environment. Pope Francis warns that if we continue with perpetuating the dangerous illusion that some persons are "more human than others," we risk the destruction of the planet (*Laudato Si'*, no. 90). Such disregard for the Other as validated through comparisons of material wealth as sole and inviolate arbiter of worth, leads only to the demise of all.

"Sublime communion" therefore requires the "deep communion" of hearts of tenderness and compassion for all our human siblings. Once we reconcile ourselves to our connectedness, we grow in our ability to forgive. Quoting St. Francis of Assisi's "Canticle of the Creatures," Pope Francis continues, "'Praised be you my Lord, through those who give pardon for your love.' Everything is connected" (*Laudato Si'*, no. 91). When we forgive, we open each to the Other. Such coming to communion through love then bonds love and care for the environment and other creatures to love and care for our human brothers and sisters. In this way, communion can be viewed as deep when love, peace, and justice guide concern for the environment as our duty to God within God's creation with a "sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society" (*Laudato Si'*, no. 91). This trinity of virtues: love, peace, and justice leads us onward to how "the destiny of all creation is bound up with the mystery of Christ, present from the beginning: 'All things have been created through him and for him' (Colossians 1:16)" (*Laudato Si'*, no. 99). In the mystery of Jesus, the incarnation of God's eternal Word in the created order generated by that same Word, is the mystery of "universal communion," a communion that includes the entirety of the created universe and invokes the mystery of the triune life of God.

Laudato Si' enacts a dialogue where listening bears teaching, bringing forth instruction in the mystery of the Word, especially the incarnate Christ who, as Word made flesh, bears witness to the communion of God, humanity, and creation. In this embodiment of the second person of the Trinity in the flesh of humanity and the world, sacred Scripture powerfully affirms the value of the created world and of its ultimate end. As Robin Attfield notes, in the Apocalypse, the author's "vision symbolically concerns the restoration of Eden and the

tree of life, the leaves of which 'were for the healing of nations' (Revelation 22:2)."²⁴ From manifestations of living speech, where listening bears teaching, we gain appreciation for the insight of Emmanuel Levinas that, "[t]he essence of discourse is ethical."²⁵ The nature of the ethical character and essence of discourse is elaborated by Gerald Hauser as he states that our commitment to "communicate is, after all, a reaffirmation that to be is to be in relationship with the Other and commitment to a relationship of a certain sort: it is a commitment to community."²⁶ Community as the situating of a communication ethic foregrounds the dialogic nexus of relationship and responsibility, hearing our ethical call, with love, to acknowledge and openly engage the Other in God, sojourners, the poor, and the animals and elements of the created world. In this way, communion through ecological instruction situated within Church teaching on the mystery of the Trinity reveals "why the Church set before the world the ideal of a 'civilization of love.' Social love is the key to authentic development" (*Laudato Si'*, no. 231).

Laudato Si' invites a dialogic response as a communication ethic open to radical difference and leading into mystery as teaching an expansive and inclusive thankfulness for our union with all God's creatures. What Pope Francis enacts through his encyclical letter embraces listening in dialogue with God, and all of God's creation, including our fellow creatures and our shared natural environment. This circular letter unfolds Catholic social teaching with an openness to alterity and the Other. The Pope offers a listening heart to the travails of this age and an attunement of spirit to the Lord for ways to more faithfully honor our fraternity with all God's gifts evident through our existence as pilgrims within God's creation.

A constructive response then grows out of wisdom of the narrative ground of *Laudato Si'*. As Pope Francis states,

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the word "creation" has a broader meaning than "nature," for it has to do with God's loving plan in which each creature has its own value and significance. Nature is usually seen as a system which can be studied, understood and controlled,

²⁴ Robin Attfield, "Christianity," in *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*, ed. Dale Jamieson (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 99.

²⁵ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 216.

²⁶ Gerard A. Hauser, "Afterword: Machiavelli's Question Mark and the Problem of Ethical

Communication," in *Philosophy of Communication Ethics: Alterity and the Other*, eds. Ronald C. Arnett and Pat Arneson (New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2014), 313.

whereas creation can only be understood as a gift from the outstretched hand of the Father of all, and as a reality illuminated by the love which calls us together into universal communion. (*Laudato Si'*, no. 76)

Pope Francis utilizes as his hermeneutic an ethic of interpretation grounded in the theological and rhetorical elements of dialogue, as exemplified in his approach to the economy of alterity, difference, and the Other. Humans and nature share one environment; harm to one simultaneously wounds the Other (*Laudato Si'*, no. 33-34). In causing harm to God's creation, whether it be to the environment or one of God's creatures, humans wound the image of God in which they are made and called to uphold and cherish.

The emphasis upon the human person as created in the image of God is recalled through the Hymn of St. Francis of Assisi. The ethical consequence of acknowledging each human being as created in God's image requires acceptance that each creature "has its own purpose. None is superfluous. The entire material universe speaks of God's love, his boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God" (*Laudato Si'*, no. 84). This eternal speaking of God's love throughout all of creation also reveals God's plan for how we are to live to within God's created universe. Pope Francis, quoting the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 340, writes, "God wills the interdependence of creatures. The sun and moon, the cedar and the little flower, the eagle and the sparrow: the spectacle of countless diversities and inequalities tells us that no creature is self-sufficient. Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the service of each other" (*Laudato Si'*, no. 86).

LAUDATO SI', DIALOGUE AS COMMUNICATION ETHIC, AND INTEGRAL ECOLOGY

Pope Francis's evocation of this "interdependence" foregrounds his notion of integral ecology. This definition of ecology as the study of the "relationship between living organisms and the environment in which they develop" (*Laudato Si'*, no. 138) enacts a dialogue with science as it leads to his construction of an integral ecology. Such an approach emphasizes the quality of interrelatedness—time and space viewed not as independent but interrelated (*Laudato Si'*, no. 138). The environment exists as and within relationship (*Laudato Si'*, no. 139). The narrative ground of sacred Scripture, the Magisterium, and Catholic social teaching serves as the basis of our conviction that, as part of the universe, called into being by one Father, all of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family, a "sublime communion" which fills us with a sacred, affectionate, and humble respect. To see the world as relationships oriented toward the Trinity

that reveals relationships of the mystery of three persons in one God, the interconnectedness of all becomes the call of social love to hear and respond to how “God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement” (*Laudato Si'*, no. 89).

Such unity which results from enactment of an integral ecology rests upon an obligation of justice: “The environment is part of a logic of receptivity. It is on loan to each generation, which must then hand it on to the next. An integral ecology is marked by this broader vision” (*Laudato Si'*, no. 159) and sense of interdependence—one world/one common plan (*Laudato Si'*, no. 165). Interdependence and unity which result from enactment of an integral ecology disclose the inseparability of ecology from the “notion of the common good ... the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment” (*Laudato Si'*, no. 156). Answering the call to care for our common good requires a conversion of ecological consciousness “whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them” (*Laudato Si'*, no. 217). Given the nature of life as embedded within relationship with the Other, any ecological conversion involves the conversion of communities in which individuals exist as well. Such conversion brings about a communication and social ethic grounded in “gratitude and gratuitousness, a recognition that the world is God’s loving gift” and that we share this gift “joined in a splendid universal communion,” wherein we strive to use our abilities to their fullest to protect, sustain, and contribute to the ecologies that comprise the relationships of our being toward the Trinity (*Laudato Si'*, no. 220).

Integral ecology then provides guidance in how to live according to the Word of God as sons of daughters of Jesus’s call to conversion. As Pope Francis states,

An integral ecology includes taking time to recover a serene harmony with creation, reflecting on our lifestyle and our ideals, and contemplating the Creator who lives among us and surrounds us, whose presence “must not be contrived but found, uncovered.” (*Laudato Si'*, no. 225)

If we turn our attention toward the love God shows us through encounter with creation, we then come to better understand “why the Church set before the world the ideal of a ‘civilization of love.’ Social love is the key to authentic development” (*Laudato Si'*, no. 231). This recognition of the shared existence of human and natural environments

opens a place to explore one way that *Laudato Si'* may be brought into dialogue with existing threats to human and natural environments within the Northern and entire Appalachian region due to the continuance of mountaintop removal mining.

Mountaintop removal mining explodes the tops of mountains for a quick and inexpensive route to exploit the coal beneath. However, this practice comes at an incredibly expensive cost to the life of the mountains and all the life they sustain. Mountaintop removal mining illustrates the danger of fostering lies that Pope Francis warns value one human life as worth more than another, ushering in a culture of death (*Laudato Si'*, no. 90). Deification of the market and the quest for economic profit nurtures destructive practices such as mountaintop removal mining that “pollute the air, foul the water, rape the land” and leave the poor voiceless without hope.²⁷

Causes of problems such as mountaintop removal mining relate back to *Laudato Si'* as Pope Francis authors a call to respond to the crying of the Earth and creation in a time of reckless greed, rampant materialism, and runaway corporate power generating a throwaway ethic that engenders a culture of death. Such formative crises serve as cause and call for a response, to which Pope Francis responds through *Laudato Si'*. Listening with openness to diverse perspectives generates a vision for ecology that engages faith and reason, religion, philosophy, and science. Such an invitational cast to social teaching points toward a co-operation and collaboration through learning from Scripture, philosophy, and the sciences. Such an ecological approach to learning and knowledge helps us to come to know our duties and responsibilities and foregrounds elements of relationships with God, with our neighbors, and with the earth that reveal the foundation of human life (*Laudato Si'*, no. 66). However, unwillingness to acknowledge our interconnectedness leads to injustice, “when justice no longer dwells in the land, the Bible tells us that life itself is endangered” (*Laudato Si'*, no. 70). To counter this potential Pope Francis states that we must expand consciousness to be attuned to the Other seen in the figures of the sojourner and the poor (*Laudato Si'*, no. 71). Such an attuned orientation to our neighbor “presupposes a direct action of God and a particular call to life and to relationship on the part of a ‘Thou’ who addresses himself to another ‘thou’” (*Laudato Si'*, no. 81). Each human being therefore possesses an inherent dignity and identity and agency from God that demands one is always seen as a subject and never reduced to an object of another (*Laudato Si'*, no. 81). In this way, one is called to see behind the eyes of each other the light and love of the Creator.

²⁷ Catholic Bishops of Appalachia, *This Land is Home to Me*, 16, www.glenmary.org/site/files/919/109298/374764/514494/Appal_Pastorals.pdf.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

A vision that heeds the call of the poor and the sojourner and gives witness through words and acts that creation is only owned by God, given to humanity as a gift to be cherished for all and not exploited for the privileged few, reveals the dialogic ethic afforded by an embrace of a “universal communion.” Such a communication ethic would seek to collaborate with the poor and voiceless of Northern Appalachia to develop dialogue and foster acknowledgement of each person’s equal worth before God and to cherish, not seek to capitalize upon, the bounty of nature. Such greater awareness affords being through communication to all parties and neighbors for mutual and sustainable benefit that draws all toward love, toward God.

The guiding idea of integral ecology reveals the dialogic element of Pope Francis’s communicative praxis, a dialogic ethic to serve what Aquinas described as the common good – Aquinas affirms that it is natural for humans to live in society, the reason for this being that it is only in this way that humans will be able to attain their ends. The aim of human society is not merely to ensure the private good of individual citizens. “Rather, its aim is to seek the supreme human good, the common good which is superior to the good of the individual.”²⁸ As Pope Francis states, “Everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity” (*Laudato Si'*, no. 240). The call to embrace the mystery of our interconnected nature articulates the communicative praxis of integral ecology as a dialogic communication ethic—*mystagogy* in *kairos*.

Johannes Hofinger states that “religious instruction is, from the very beginning, not so much history as ‘*mystagogy*,’ that is, an introduction into the mystery of Christ, instruction in the practice and development of this life.”²⁹ Pope Benedict XVI states that “The mature fruit of *mystagogy* is an awareness that one’s life is being progressively transformed.”³⁰ “*Mystagogy* promotes faithful participation in the time of *Kairos*.”³¹ The present environmental and humanitarian crises that ravage the globe regularly announce a time of *kairos* that demands an ethical constructive response grounded in love of God and for all of God’s creation. As a response to this call, integral ecology

²⁸ Aquinas, *Sententia Libri Politicorum* I, 1, 11.

²⁹ Gerard F. Baumbach, “Eucharistic Mystagogy,” United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, uscbb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catechesis/catechetical-sunday/eucharist/upload/catsun-2011-doc-baumbach-mystagogy.pdf.

³⁰ *Sacramentum Caritatis*, no. 64.

³¹ Baumbach, “Eucharistic Mystagogy.”

functions as a communication ethic—a dialogic enactment of narrative fidelity to God’s revelation, the embodied speaking of God’s Word, Jesus Christ, into time and throughout time. Pope Francis’s communication ethic then serves as instruction into the mystery of Trinitarian dialogue as relational being, as a fitting response in a time of crisis engaged and offered with gratitude for the mystery of sustaining narrative fidelity within the fleeting, contingent nature of human existential reality.

For as Pope Francis seeks to help us embrace Christ within creation and the face of the Other, and guides us to lead others to experience the gospel of love he derives from the narrative of Holy Scripture and Church teachings, we witness a listening calling forth speech grounded in a narrative meeting contingency, inspired by the meeting of God and humans in a time of *kairos*. *Kairoi* as crises in history create opportunities and demand an existential response by a subject, the coming of Christ as the prime example within Christian theology. In this time of *kairos*, Pope Francis listens to crises of human and natural devastation and poverty. His embodied listening then informs how he serves as a *mystagogue* to lead people to free themselves of the chains of the worldly and embrace the freedom, peace, and love that may only come through Trinitarian dialogue with and fidelity to the narrative of God’s revelation of God’s Word. Pope Francis’s communication ethic of integral ecology authors a path to a “universal communion” with God through working to realize the common good of all through the common care of all. **M**